

As prepared for delivery:

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Your Excellencies, Friends

Only 10 years ago democracy flourished. Now we accept that there is a democratic recession – loss of confidence, uncertainty about what works best, falling budgets, the disappearance of consensus.

But to end a recession we cannot retreat. There must indeed be a stimulus package. This cannot be unilateral. Nor can it come from only one corner of the world. Its correct custodian and leader is the Community of Democracies.

To achieve this in the next decade, we must accept who we are, if necessary allowing skeptics the space to depart and finding the formula to welcome the willing and able. We must then focus on what we do.

Ladies and Gentleman, ordinary South Africans do not know your countries by the efficiency of your embassies but by the quality of your football fans.

A stimulus package requires us to ensure that our own practice of democracy and the quality of our citizens speak for themselves. All of us have domestic failings – what efforts are we marshalling to deepen and broaden democracy at home?

Perhaps in doing this we will also learn the lessons for our larger common task, the stimulation of demand for democracy world wide.

Given its urgency, it is therefore a shame that so essential a task as education for democracy has not yet found a country champion amongst our ranks.

In educating people for democracy, as in other areas, it is necessary during recessionary times to be honest about doing what is essential.

If necessary, let us use the opportunity of straitened circumstances to send some of our staff back to school – preferably in a different context – so that we learn to do what is best for democracy in the 21st century as it is.

Money is also important, and if it is true that there is less of it, then we must certainly use it even more wisely. I suspect, however, that much of the revenue potentially available still makes its way to contradictory expenditures and short term interests. Whatever the case, there are certainly competing priorities.

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Therefore the stimulation of ideas, values, debate and decisions in our own parliaments and amongst our own tax payers about what benefits accrue for democracy at home and amongst our neighbors near and far is essential.

The package for the stimulation of demand thus requires commitment in our own countries, honesty about doing systematically and coherently what really makes a difference, and educating people for democracy.

In my opinion it requires at least one thing more. Kowtowing to bullies while ignoring the plight of their victims is not non-interference - it is cowardice. Where would South Africa be, friends, if your citizens and your predecessors in government had stood aside?

All delegates to this 10th anniversary regarding commitment have received the Diplomat's Handbook for Democracy Development Support. In it you will read of courageous men and women, citizens and public officials from all our countries who did indeed stimulate democracy - not because it was a product their country was exporting, but because through it they had become human and because they understood that others sought only the same right.

As John Kennedy said, we choose to stimulate democracy not because it is easy, but because it is hard. Let the Community of Democracies lead us out of recession.